

# Operating Permits for Drinking Water Systems

*Information for Water Systems and Local Decision Makers*

May 2004

Revised  
DOH PUB. #331-168

## Background

Legislation passed in 1991 requires all Group A public water systems to apply for an annual operating permit. The legislation had two major purposes:

1. Provide a compliance tool linked to annual performance evaluations of water systems.
2. Provide revenue to support administration of the state drinking water program.

In early 2004 the Department of Health modified the Operating Permit Regulation, Chapter 246-294 WAC, to provide clearer guidance on water system status. The operating permit gives the Office of Drinking Water (ODW) a way to provide a basic evaluation of a system's performance with respect to drinking water requirements and present the findings in a meaningful way to consumers, system owners and operators, permitting authorities and lending institutions. The regulation revision provides more useable information regarding the adequacy of a water system to serve existing services or to grow. ODW also uses the operating permit as a tool to accomplish its mission of protecting the health of the people of Washington State by assuring safe and reliable drinking water.

Group A water systems are those which have 15 or more service connections or regularly serve 25 or more people 60 or more days per year.

## Requirements for Group A water systems

Owners must get an operating permit each year. To do so, they complete and return an annual fee statement along with the appropriate fee to the Department of Health before a specified time each year. ODW processes and issues operating permits throughout the year based on system size and type.

## Evaluation and compliance

The operating permit is intended to serve as an enforcement tool and to provide information on the compliance status and adequacy of a public water system. To achieve this, ODW developed categories, which identify a water system's general compliance status. Those categories are:

- Green:** Systems are in substantial compliance with all requirements. ODW recommends these systems be viewed as adequate for existing uses and additional connections up to the approved number of connections unless they are already at capacity.
- Yellow:** Systems are substantially in compliance with all requirements except they 1) have been notified to submit a water system plan but have not satisfied the planning requirement; or 2) are under a compliance agreement for a state significant non-complier violation. ODW recommends these systems be viewed as adequate for existing uses and additional connections up to the approved number unless otherwise limited by a compliance agreement.
- Blue:** Systems are substantially in compliance with requirements except the system does not meet design approval requirements or has exceeded the number of approved connections established by the department. ODW recommends these systems be viewed as adequate for existing uses, but not adequate for adding new connections.
- Red:** Systems are in substantial non-compliance with requirements. ODW recommends these systems be viewed as inadequate for existing uses and no additional connections be allowed. This may result in denial of home loans, building permits, on-site sewage disposal permits, food service permits, liquor licenses, and other permits or licenses for properties served by the system.

## **For More Information**

### **Washington State Department of Health:**

Drinking Water Southwest Regional Office: 360-664-0768  
Drinking Water Northwest Regional Office: 253-395-6750  
Drinking Water Eastern Regional Office: 509-456-3115  
General Information: 1-800-521-0323

**Office of Drinking Water:** <http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/dw>

